

VZCZCXRO9632  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #0692 0690714  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 090714Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6126  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000692

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/09/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: MONEY, DEATH, AND LIES: SHIA MODERATE ON SOUTHERN  
POLITICS, ELECTIONS

Classified By: Acting Deputy Political Counselor Martin Dale for reason  
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) In a March 6 meeting with Poloff, Sheikh Abid Faisal identified positive and negative aspects to the prospect of provincial elections. Although he acknowledged public appetite for governmental change, he said the power of the religious parties made it likely they would consolidate their power in the south. Nevertheless, Faisal said he and a group of 13 prominent southern sheikhs are considering forming an independent coalition to compete in the elections. Faisal said the group is meeting with Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, the Anbari Sunni leader of the Iraqi Awakening (SAI) movement, to exchange strategies and discuss the possibility of forming a slate of Sunni and Shi'a candidates.

[12](#). (C) Faisal bemoaned the current state of southern politics, saying it characterized by "money, death, and lies." He added that rural to urban migration, combined with the flight of many local intellectuals and leaders, have led to the dominance of uneducated and inexperienced politicians in local government. He said tension was growing between the political parties in Dhi Qar and predicted that Da'wa and the Sadr Trend would form an alliance to compete against ISCI in the next elections. Faisal added that "70-80 percent" of southern Shi'a oppose ISCI's plan for a nine governorate southern region, explaining that people opposed the idea of Najaf becoming the capital of the south and feared federalism as the first step to partition. He said the marja'iyya has retained its influence, partly through financial support to key individuals, civic organizations, and charities, and expressed worry that the marja'iyya would intervene in the elections by instructing Shi'a how to vote.

[13](#). (C) On the subject of Iran, Faisal warned that Tehran was increasing its influence on the southern Shi'a. He urged the U.S. to increase its humanitarian and development assistance in the south, saying public perception of the U.S. would affect the willingness of Shi'a voters to support independent and secular candidates. Poloff promised to arrange a meeting between the sheikh and PRT Dhi Qar to discuss project ideas.

[14](#). (C) Bio notes: Faisal (DOB 7/1/49) is a landowner from Nasiriyah and holds the title of sheikh. Following the overthrow of Saddam, Faisal worked with Samir al-Sumaydi, currently the Iraqi Ambassador to the U.S., to establish the secular Shi'a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) party, and Faisal served in the Transitional National Assembly as a representative of the NDA. The NDA failed to win any seats in the 2005 elections.  
CROCKER